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I would like to look at the last parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan that have taken place on August 18 this year from the point of view of the country's commitments with the OSCE.

First off, the early election was hastily announced after a set of constitutional amendments that were pushed through the previous legislature (which also included no opposition members, just like the new one) in less than half of an hour. The amendments further decreased the status of the parliament, leaving even smaller place for debates. Moreover, a part of the parliament is now appointed by the president, who has full power to dissolve the legislature. Most of the changes run counter to the OSCE norms and put in doubt the prospects of parliamentarism in Kazakhstan.

Another significant deterioration was that the new electoral rules made the parties politically less instrumental by banning creation of pre-election coalitions. Two prominent opposition figures, Bulat Abilov and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov were again not allowed to run for the office due to politically motivated convictions. Besides, before the previous parliamentary elections in 2004, opposition party Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan had been registered. This year, two parties that position themselves as critics of the government – “Alga” and “Atameken” – were denied official registration. Thus, the voters' choice was limited.

The opposition's access to the media was censored and disproportionately low. The major and the only registered opposition party, the All-National Social Democratic Party, was represented only in 3 per cent of the lower level election commissions. On the voting day, the situation moved into a much harsher and less technological phase, on which the OSCE standards were not even taken into consideration. The techniques employed were multiple voting, stuffing the ballot boxes and totally non-transparent counting of the votes.

Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj, who headed the OSCE Election Observation Mission this year said in an interview to the local newspaper that violations and irregularities during the ballot counting in 40 per cent of the observed polling stations is an incredible figure that he has witnessed for the first time, while 10 per cent of such kind of violations is already a great reason to put in question the elections as such.

The election commissions were very reluctant to give away the result protocols to the opposition party's observers; they were able to collect them only on some 50 per cent of the polling stations. Post-electoral developments showed that the authorities have not even met their own voluntarily undertaken commitments – although they had assured that the Central Election Commission will post all result protocols from the precincts on its website in 5 days period, this process, in reality, took more than one month. Moreover, the results obtained through the so-called e-voting system were not announced at all! The appeals and complaints process was curtailed by the courts on the very initial stages – the opposition's suits were either turned down or not even accepted.

In conclusion, there is a strong and insistent recommendation to the OSCE/ODIHR to make sure that the final report on observation of this year's parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan includes all of the facts of violations and irregularities, and gives an appropriate evaluation of the election campaign in terms of their compliance with the standards of democratic elections. In addition, it is highly requested that the OSCE/ODIHR applies more consistent pressure on the Kazakhstani authorities concerning adoption of the OSCE recommendations concerning election legislation, which are still pending since 2004.